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Cultural Heritage and Museums

Foreword

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Foreword

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- 1 Cultural heritage and museums connote many diverse realities, especially since the last decades of the 20th century when the demand for and access to cultural rights became more diversified and when the social and technological bases of politics and communications were undergoing structural change. Heritage and museums were emancipated from their original function as support for the ideological underpinning of nation states, becoming more flexible and acquiring multiple meanings through their most diverse usages.
- 2 Anthropological research in Brazil has reacted actively and critically to these changes as may be seen in recent publications and events organized by the Brazilian Anthropological Association (ABA) and other professional and academic organizations. A possible common denominator of the various points of view, theoretical and thematic preferences adopted by researchers has been the understanding of heritage as a complex socio-cultural construction that results from negotiations and conflicts involving actors, objects and administrative practices. Museums have become loci for the production of memory, the reconstruction of collective identities and demands for social recognition. As such, they have become much more dynamic, open to experimentation and new ways of communicating with their publics.
- 3 These changes came about in Brazil as the military regime came to an end in the mid 1980s and with the promulgation of a new Constitution in 1988. In it, the State was required: "to ensure to all the full exercise of cultural rights" (Art.215), "to protect the expressions of popular, Indian and Afro-Brazilian cultures, as well as those of other groups participating in the national civilization process" (Idem, Para.1); and Brazilian cultural heritage as "the assets of a material and immaterial nature (...) that bear reference to the identity, action and memory of the various groups that form Brazilian society" (Art. 216).
- 4 This dossier aims to illuminate the conflicts and ideological wrangles of the field in order to present a wide view of the state of the art in contemporary Brazil. Reacting to the diversity of issues and theoretical perspectives of the papers submitted, we decided to organize them in three thematic sections. We then created an introductory section in

which, following Vibrant's tradition of republishing important works in its section *Déjà Lu*, we have included texts extracted from debates on the issue and reports on the listing of specific monuments and cultural practices in order to add historical depth to this volume.

- 5 This section, *The 1980s agenda*, concentrates on the challenges to notions of cultural heritage and museums as then practiced by leading Brazilian institutions of cultural policy, that were part of the intense mobilization of civil society during the fight for democracy in the 1970s and 1980s. This period represents a turning point in the theoretical and political posture of anthropologists, as they strengthened their relationship with the public at large and those professionals who had, up to that time, been responsible for running museums and developing cultural heritage policy in Brazil and abroad. With a view to providing insights into these questions when they became more strongly voiced by anthropologists - coincidentally just three decades ago - we include contributions by Eunice Durham and Antonio Arantes (Arantes, 1984), an unpublished public lecture by Ruth Cardoso and a text written by Gilberto Velho published in the official journal of the National Heritage Institute, all dated 1983. A selection of images has been added to draw attention to the polemical and historical listing of the Afro-Brazilian temple *Ilê Axé Iyá Nassô Oká*, known as the *Terreiro da Casa Branca*, as a national monument. The National Consultative Council of the Institute for Historical and Artistic Heritage approved the designation on May 31, 1984, on the basis of a report by Gilberto Velho, then ABA's President, and other studies and arguments, among them texts by anthropologists Ordep Serra, Olympio Serra and Peter Fry.
- 6 In the second section called *Heritage, memory and the city*, José Guilherme Magnani, José Reginaldo Gonçalves, Roberta Guimarães e Rogério Proença Leite explore different aspects of the way heritage issues affect contemporary urban experience and are related to social and economic transformations in the great cities of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Recife. In the fourth article in this section Maria Ignês Mantovani Franco focuses on the building of contemporary collections that reflect the diversity of experiences of urban living.
- 7 Otherness, the third section, contains texts on the way in which museums and heritage policies are related to social inequalities and discrimination. Yvonne Maggie and Ulisses Neves Rafael analyze museum collections of articles apprehended in Afro-Brazilian religious centres. Livio Sansone discusses the challenges of using digital technologies for disseminating information on the Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage. Lux Vidal writes on the building of indigenous museums based on her longtime experience with the indigenous peoples of the Oiapoque region, and appears giving an interview in a video made by Regina Abreu. Fabíola A. Silva and Cesar Gordon evaluate an interesting experience as co-curators together with the Xikrin People of an ethnographic collection in a university museum in São Paulo. Finally, Ilana Seltzer Goldstein discusses the paradox of the fact that museums and art galleries all over the world and in Australia hold important collections of aboriginal artworks while in their native country they became socially invisible.
- 8 In the last section, *Safeguarding the intangible*, interest turns to the challenges to the administration of cultural heritage by recent legislation: the Federal Decree 3551 of 2000, that inaugurated the register and the National Program on Immaterial Heritage in Brazil; and the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, that was ratified by Brazil in 2006. Geraldo Andreello tells of

the first experience in designating immaterial heritage in Brazil: the register of sacred indigenous sites while Vincent Carelli engages Andrello's work with a poignant video made during the work of identifying these sites. Guillaume Samson and Carlos Sandroni embark upon a comparative analysis of the motives and justifications that led to the inclusion of samba de roda (Bahia, Brazil) and of maloya (Reunion Island) in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mankind created by the UNESCO convention. To complete the dossier, Daniela Alfonsi and Clara Azevedo describe the process of constructing registers of the memory and practice of playing football in the city of São Paulo with the aim of bringing about an innovative museum experience. Their text is complemented by a video by Aira Bonfim and Danilo Delfino.

- 9 Finally we would like to point out that in organizing this dossier we have followed the established practice in this field of study of bringing together photographs and audiovisual materials as heuristic devices to dialog with and complement the texts themselves. By the same token, we invited José Roberto Aguilar to participate in the dossier with his paintings entitled *Bandeiras dos Visionários* (Flags of the Visionaries). His contribution to a dossier that is authored by anthropologists in Brazilian universities questions our certainties and shifts the horizons of our enquiry, not only of our interpretative paradigms, but also the limits of the language we employ most of the time.
- 10 The theme of cultural heritage necessarily raises a number of questions relating to the kind of country one lives in, the world one inhabits and the future one desires. Increasingly, museums have become places to house views of the world, one's country and the future as well as various ways of expressing them.
- 11 We thank the authors, editors of *Vibrant*, the translators, the technical staff and the webmaster who patiently and generously responded to the somewhat uncommon demands that we have been making throughout the process of construction of this dossier.